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SUBJECT: PRC: WHITE HOUSE SENIOR ADVISOR VALERIE JARRETT
LEADS FORUM ON WOMEN'S ISSUES AT EMBASSY

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1. (SBU) Summary: In a November 18 round table with White House Senior Advisor and Chair of the White House Council on Women and Girls Valerie Jarrett, Chinese activists working on issues effecting women and girls in China noted that while there had been significant improvements in China on women's issues since the 1995 World Conference on Women, further work was needed, particularly in political participation, health, and economic development and opportunities. The proportion of female delegates in the National People's Congress (NPC) had increased, but remained insufficient. Access to healthcare services remained a challenge for women, especially rural women; and there was still no specific criminal statute on domestic violence. Chinese women continue to face challenges in balancing personal and professional demands. End Summary.

Women Leaders Discussion Forum

2. (SBU) On November 18, White House Senior Advisor Valerie Jarrett met with a group of 18 Chinese women and men engaged in work on women's issues. The participants spoke about the work of their organizations to improve the lives of Chinese women and girls, highlighting both traditional and innovative methods, such as micro-lending, being used to address the challenges facing women in China. Participants noted the importance of taking country-specific conditions into account when crafting strategies for empowering and elevating women. Despite recognizing significant improvements in China over the last fifteen years, all participants cited the need for additional efforts, particularly in the areas of political participation, health and economic disparities. Senior Advisor Jarrett briefed on U.S. initiatives to improve the lives of women and girls in the U.S. and globally.

Women's Political Participation Continues to Fall Short

3. (SBU) Wan Yan, Deputy Director of the State Council Office of the National Working Committee on Children and Women (NWCCW), reported that while the proportion of female delegates in the National People's Congress (NPC) had increased, it still fell short of the thirty-percent mark required by the Beijing Platform for Action that was agreed upon at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. According to Wan Yan, female deputies comprised over twenty-one percent of the 2009 NPC. China only had three female cabinet members, she pointed out. Asked about strategies used to increase political participation by women, Wan Yan cited the example of Guangdong provincial officials, who were now requiring that one-third of candidates standing for village elections be women in order for the elections to be recognized as valid.

4. (SBU) Zou Xiaoqiao, from the All China Women's Federation

(ACWF), acknowledged that political participation in rural regions was "not optimal." To increase grassroots political participation, she said, the ACWF cooperated with villages and counties to train women in the skills needed to serve as village leaders.

Challenges Remain in Health, Social Arenas

15. (SBU) Access to healthcare services remained a challenge for women, especially rural women, Zou noted. The ACWF was working with the government to provide cancer screening and aimed by 2011 to provide 1.2 million women the opportunity to receive such health checks. The NWCCW, noted Wan Yan, was focusing efforts on lowering maternal mortality. In 2001, one in 10,000 Chinese women had died in childbirth. By 2006, that number had been reduced because of funding for pre-natal medical care. Wan added that while most rural women previously had given birth at home, now 88 percent of women gave birth in hospitals. Gao Xiaoxian, Chair of the Shanxi Province Research Association for Women and Family, commented that in addition to health care and health screening, basic health education remained a problem in rural areas. To address this deficit, her NGO was working to increase health education through the establishment of health clinics and classrooms.

16. (SBU) Chen Mingxia, a professor at the Institute of Law at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, described efforts made by her NGO, the Network for Combating Domestic Violence.

Over the last fifteen years, the Chinese public generally had acknowledged the phenomenon of domestic violence, which

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also had been addressed peripherally in existing Chinese law.

However, there was still no specific criminal statute on domestic violence, Chen said.

17. (SBU) Wang Xingjuan, founder of the Maple Women's Counseling Center, emphasized the importance of mental health to women's overall wellbeing. The Center primarily served rural women, single parents and victims of domestic violence.

Noting that suicide rates for women far exceeded those for men in China, Wu Qing, of the Practical Skills Training Center for Rural Women, explained that her organization was focused on suicide prevention. (Note: A 2007 China Daily article reported that China's suicide rates were among the world's highest and that rural suicides outnumbered urban suicides in China.)

18. (SBU) Several participants noted that Chinese women faced challenges in balancing personal and professional demands.

Feng Cui, head of the China Association of Women Entrepreneurs (CAWE), noted that two-thirds of woman entrepreneurs were responsible for taking care of their families (which in China typically includes an older generation as well as children), a situation which was often an obstacle to career advancement.

Overcoming Economic Hurdles; Poverty Reduction

19. (SBU) ACWF's Zou discussed government efforts to provide interest-free micro-loans to women as a poverty-alleviation strategy. These loans were primarily used to help women start their careers and set up companies, Zou said. China, women largely did not enter the business realm until the 1990s, and even then, women worked mainly in private enterprises such as clothing and catering. However, some women have recently made inroads in traditionally "male" fields such as the steel, automotive, and hi-tech industries, commented Feng. CAWE's Feng said her organization provided legal aid and financial assistance to its members to support women's small and medium-sized enterprises, noting that these loans typically averaged 50,000-100,000 RMB. The recent financial crisis had impacted women-owned enterprises in

China. A June 2009 CAWE survey found that 13 percent of women-run enterprises had cut employees, she said, but despite reductions in staff, many had been able to survive.

Legal Aid, Education and Media Issues

¶10. (SBU) Guo Jianmei, a prominent women's rights lawyer, spoke about the legal assistance and advocacy efforts of her Women's Law Studies and Legal Action Center. While demand for legal aid far exceeded supply, Guo said, she and the Center's twelve lawyers worked to select cases that best represented challenges facing Chinese women, and ones that had the potential to influence policy and set precedents. In her view, over the last fifteen years, women's legal issues had been on a bumpy, but hopeful, pathway. A continuous increase in the number of NGOs focusing on lawsuits protecting women's rights was one hopeful sign. However, she said, a lack of human and other resources for this type of work remained a formidable obstacle to progress in the legal arena. (Note: On November 30, Peking University informed Guo that the Center needed to focus solely on legal research, vice legal aid, or disassociate from the university.)

¶11. (SBU) Education of girls is crucial, Wu Qing, of the Practical Skills Training Center for Rural Women, said. Observing that mothers were often a child's first teacher, Wu noted that educating a girl educated an entire family. Wu emphasized that one of the goals of her program was to educate girls to become "global citizens" and "whole people." Education helped women understand their rights. Illiteracy remained a serious problem in China, with one in ten people, or 100 million citizens, illiterate. Wu invited Jarrett to visit a rural women's school on her next trip to China. Zhao Jie, Director of the Gender and Participation Research Center at the Yunnan Province Academy of Social Sciences, pointed out the need to draw on unique aspects of minority cultures in educating girls, and to capitalize on local knowledge to empower women and girls.

¶12. (SBU) Zhang Yue, anchorwoman of the CCTV program "Half the Sky," noted her program was the only television show to focus exclusively on women's issues. The program addressed a range of topics, including girls' education, trafficking in persons and political participation of women, and provided a valuable and unique platform for the discussion of these issues in China.

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